

The Release of the Evil

by Gabscroll

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Summary: An evil force changes Xena and things get out of hand. The first part of a three story arc.

The Release of the Evil

Destroyer of Nations: The Release of the Evil **

"The Destroyer of Nations"

> The Release of the Evil <div>**

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**Subtext: **If any, it's not meant to be.

> Violence: Yes. Lots of it. If it bothers you, use that 'back' function on your web browser.

> HurtComfort: **More hurt than comfort.

> Language: Nothing more than a typical episode.

> Synopsis: They thought the evil was gone. Now, Xena, Gabrielle, Hercules and Iolaus team up for a final showdown.

Author: Jen

> Date Written: June 18, 1999

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 **Author's Note: **I relied heavily on the third and fourth seasons for this epic. This is a story that you'll have to read and pay attention too, or else you'll find yourself lost. This is probably the darkest story of which I'll ever write, because I'm totally cruel to the relationship of Xena and Gab. However, on a lighter note â€“ there is a couple of exchanges, which could be seen as "subtext". I tell you this: It was unintentional and well, quite

frankly, it worked for the frame of mind of the character at the time. And I had a laugh when I wrote it.

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Chapter One

>
 Going Their Separate Ways

> They needed time off. It wasn't so much from each other, but just from traveling. They had been traveling for quite some time, years it seemed like. Their journey back, wasn't easy. In order to be successful, they each had to complete a series of journeys to regain their strength and to return to the life they once knew. Defeating Callisto, was just one of them. Their tasks took their toll.

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"See you in two weeks," a cheerful Gabrielle said. She waved good-bye to long time her friend.

"Don't get lost," Xena warned. She waved good-bye to her friend.

The two friends departed in opposite directions. Gabrielle was heading towards Poteidaia and Xena towards Amphipolis. Neither family had been expecting their return. Surprises are everything.

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Gabrielle walked for what seemed like days. She had to rest. She found a nearby stream and decided to take a break, perhaps eat some berries or something to tide her over until she reached her village. She was looking forward to this visit home. She wanted so much to see her sister, her mother and her father. She wanted to see her family. She wanted to spend every moment she could with them.

After a short break, Gabrielle set off again on the trail. She knew she wasn't that far from her village. Ah, her village. The only peace she really knew in her life. Things were simpler back then. But then, that was why she left in the first place. She wanted to experience the world. She wanted to live the world. So, off she went. She followed the person she knew could help her. The person that had saved her. This was the same road, only she was going home instead of leaving it.

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Xena decided to give Argo a break. She knew she needed a break as well. She let Argo drink from the stream. Xena was looking forward to her visit home as well. When she first left Amphipolis, it was not on

the best of terms. When she returned, it was not on the best terms. When she left again, it was better. Each time she returned, things improved. The simple villagers no longer saw Xena, The Destroyer of Nations. They saw a good person, making good, doing good for the greater good.

Xena was about to return to the path when a half-dozen men approached her.

"Give us your money," demanded the bandit. A gruesome looking man. He was in need of a bath.

Xena nonchalantly climbed off Argo. She approached whom she thought was the leader of this pathetic looking band of thugs. "And what if I don't?"

"We take it from you," the bandit said. "Either way, we get your money." "I suggest you find a new way of getting money," Xena smirked. She kicked him in the chest, sending him backwards.

The remaining bandits stood steadfast.

"The name is Degas. I'm the person that's going to kill you," he said. He charged Xena with his sword in one hand and a dagger in the other.

"You wish," Xena said. She deflected his thrust and kicked him back, sending straight in the stream.

The rest of the bandits spared no time in getting their chance. They didn't know whom they were fighting. All they knew was that they didn't want their reputation ruined because they were defeated by a woman.

The bandits were no-match for Xena. It was only down to between Xena and Degas. Degas laid in a few lucky blows. But Xena managed to fight him off. Degas and his band fled into the woods.

"No sense in getting killed over this one boys," Degas said.

Xena watched them leave. "Will this ever end?" she sighed. Xena sheathed her sword and mounted Argo one more time. It would be morning before she would arrive in Amphipolis. No matter, she was going home.

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 The Morning After
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Gabrielle decided to not take her time in getting to Poteidaia. She wanted to be there for breakfast. She suddenly felt strange, light-headed. She stopped to rest for a few moments. Gabrielle thought it was maybe the heat. Or maybe it was the lack of a good meal. Either way, she wanted to get home. Her gut feeling was telling her something was wrong. She remembered something Xena had told her. "If your gut tells you something is wrong, it usually is," Xena's voice said. Hearing her friend's voice brought a small smile to her

face. She looked around, checking her surroundings. Xena often told her to pay more attention. Gabrielle often forgot this golden rule when traveling alone.

It was early morning, the marketplace had yet to open up. The merchants were already setting up to begin the day's work. Village life was simple. It was something Gabrielle looked forward to when growing up. But as she got older, she grew out of living the simple life. There came a point when she wanted to leave. And leave she did. She does miss the simple life, but has no regrets about the choices she made.

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Xena awoke with a horrendous headache. It even hurt to open her eyes. She assumed it was stemming from her skirmish with the road bandits the previous day. Shaking it off, she stood up. She recognized her surroundings, but couldn't figure out why she was there. She was hungry. Cooking wasn't one of her strongest skills, but she could manage if she had too.

"Well, well. If it isn't our friend from yesterday," Degas said. He unsheathed his sword and approached the Warrior Princess. "Time to pay up."

"Pay up for what," the warrior remarked. "Go away."

"Go away? No, no . . . give us your money," Degas ordered. He didn't like repeating himself.

"If you insist on staying," Xena demanded. She approached him and did her pinch on him. "Just so you know, I've cut off the flow of blood to your brain. You'll be dead in thirty seconds."

"What do you want to know?" Degas choked.

"Nothing. I just want you to know how long you have to live," Xena said. She walked away.

Degas continued to choke. He felt his life draining away from him. He fell forward, dead. Xena rode off on Argo, going in no particular direction.

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"Gabrielle?" a woman asked.

Gabrielle turned around. "Lila!" She was happy to see her sister. The two women embraced in a hug.

"What are you doing here?" Lila asked Gabrielle made rare appearances at home. "Where's Xena?"

"She's in Amphipolis," Gabrielle said. "It's so good to see you."

"Come, we are just about to eat breakfast," Lila said. She ushered her big sister into the house.

Gabrielle stopped when she reached the door. She felt light headed again.

"Gabrielle, are you okay?" Lila asked with concern. "You don't look good."

"I feel weird," Gabrielle replied. "I think it's from not having a good meal for a while. Don't get to eat a good meal on the road very much."

"We can fix that," Lila said, smiling.

The Prodigal daughter has returned to her home.

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Ares, God of War and the Peaceful Village

"Hmm," Ares sighed. "So unlike you."

"What do you mean? So unlike me," Xena asked. Many warriors paid tribute to the War God. Xena wasn't one to pay much homage to the Gods. She didn't trust them or need them for that matter. She felt a strange connection to War God.

"You let that man die," Ares said.

"And that's unlike me?"

Ares couldn't figure it out. But he didn't let it bother him too much. Something had gone wrong, and Xena was back.

"No."

"Then why did you say it was unlike me?" Xena questioned. She may not have much trust in the gods, but found it fun playing with them. Especially the God of War.

"No reason. You just seem different, and I like it," Ares chuckled. He knew his 'chosen one' would be back in his control someday. "Where is your friend at?"

"Friend? I have no friends. Friends betray you. They can kill you given the chance," Xena mused.

Ares was startled by this. For every waking moment of his attempts to get his Warrior Princess back, the annoying little blonde had been by her side. She was gone. Xena had no memory of her. This was a good thing. No blonde to sway her back onto the path of righteousness. He

loved this Xena. The cutthroat, brilliant commander was back with him. He had plans for her.

"I need an army," Xena demanded.

"I can get you one," Ares said. "But you have to do one thing for me." He walked over to her. He put his arms around her waist and pulled her close. "You have to destroy this village. It's called Poteidaia."

Xena pulled away from him. "Why? What have some pathetic peaceful loving villagers done to you?"

"Because they are peaceful, that's why. Besides, I want you get rid of a problem for me," Ares said.

"And what do I get in return?" Xena asked.

"You not only get your army, but your chance of claiming the 'Destroyer of Nations' title for yourself," Ares said. "That title suits you."

"Destroyer of Nations . . . ? It does have certain ring to it."

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"It's so good to have you back home," Hecuba, her mother said. She gave her daughter a hug. "You look ill."

"Just hungry is all," Gabrielle said. She felt something wasn't right. She couldn't explain it herself let alone anyone else. She again dismissed it as being hungry.

"Where's father?" Gabrielle asked.

"He's working in the store today," mother replied. "Here." She hadn't her daughter a plate full of food.

Gabrielle had hoped her appetite didn't go away. It didn't. Xena had always said she'd never seen a person eat so much in her life. Gabrielle always had a healthy appetite.

"So what travels have you and Xena been on?" Lila asked.

"Lila, let your sister eat and rest up. I'm sure she'll tell us all about her adventures Xena later on. Come," mother said.

When Lila and mother returned, Gabrielle had fallen asleep at the table. They carried her into the bedroom.

"She looks like she hasn't slept for days," their mother commented. She placed a blanket over her. "Let her sleep."

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Ares couldn't figure this sudden change of heart out. Even he knew she would never knowingly leave her way of the 'warrior.' He wanted to find out just what was going on. He may have been proud to have his favorite warrior back. But she didn't even so much flinch when he mentioned she is to destroy Poteidaia. Her behavior was odd. He didn't want her to get killed her first time out. He set out to find what was going.

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Chapter Two

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>
 The Dreamscape

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 Gabrielle had quickly found herself asleep and in a dreamscape. Nothing like she had ever experienced before. This was different. It was out of necessity. "This is my dream. What are you doing here?" Demanded Gabrielle.

An astonished Ares found himself in Gabrielle's dreamscape. But why? Why was he here. "We are on common ground."

"Common ground? I don't think so," Gabrielle said. She looked around. Nothing about this place even remotely ringed a bell.

"We are both worried about the same person," Ares said.

"Xena?" Gabrielle asked. But why would he be concerned about Xena.
"Why do you care?"

"Because. I can care about a mortal every now and then you know,"
Ares smirked.

"Only when it suits your purpose," Gabrielle interjected.

"Be careful," Ares warned. He then vanished.

"Something about this place . . . , " Gabrielle said. She then heard a familiar voice call out to her. It wasn't Xena's. "Hope?"

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The Siege of Costos

"The villagers refused to give into our demands," Antonius said. He looked to his commander with great despair.

"Very well then. Burn it to the ground," Xena ordered. She looked down onto the village. She was smitten with their fear. She could smell it.

"When do you wish to attack," a soldier asked.

"Now will do," Xena said. She stayed behind, watching her army raze Costos to the ground. Xena never stayed behind her army. She would often lead them into battle. It was what a devoted commander did. And Xena was devoted.

Her soldiers burned the huts. Took food, took valuables and slaughtered anyone that opposed them.

The siege was over in a matter of a few candlemarks. The land was destroyed. The women and children were left alive, at least those that remained in the village. Most of them ran when the army came.

"Xena! Xena!" the men chanted. They hailed their commander.

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Awakenings

> Gabrielle awoke in a cold sweat. Something had frightened her.
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"You okay?" Lila asked. She tried to hold a calming hand out to Gabrielle.

"Something is happening. It's Xena. She's in trouble," Gabrielle said.

"I'm sure whatever it is, Xena can take care of it herself," Lila said. "You should rest some more." Lila helped her lay back down on the bed.

"If your gut tells you something is wrong, it usually is," Xena commanded as Gabrielle drifted back to sleep.

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The Message to Poteidaia

> "What do you want with me," the villager pleaded. <p>

Xena had a death grip on the old man. "I want you to go to Poteidaia. Warn them that they don't give us what we want, we'll kill them all. Including the woman and children," Xena ordered. She released him and he fell to the ground.

Two soldiers pick him up an escort him to the village.

"Put him on a horse. Take a few of the heads with you, place them in

sacks and send them back with him. That should convince them that we mean business."

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"Help! You are in danger," the rider shouted.

Gabrielle and Lila were shopping in the marketplace.

The rider climbed off his horse. By this time, a small circle had formed.

"A fearless, heartless warlord. If you don't give into their demands, they'll kill you all," the rider said. He collapsed to the ground.

"By the Gods," a villager snapped.

"What demands?" another villager asked.

Several arrows flew into the village.

Gabrielle took Lila and got her to safety. The one time she wanted Xena, and she wasn't there. Too far to go for help.

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****The Village Warrior****

> "You are our only hope," the village elder said. "You helped us before." <p>

"That was different," Gabrielle urged. She could do it again, but without a 'real' warrior, they'd be defeated in a fight.

"Surely, that Xena taught you something," another elder quipped.

They were right. Xena had taught her something. Never bite off more than you can chew. Never force yourself into a situation you can't handle. And when outnumbered, run. She couldn't run. She could handle the situation. She could only hope that maybe Xena had heard about the attack and was on her way.

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****The Fearsome Duo****

> "Come on Herc," Iolaus said. "Minos said that he'd meet us in Costos." <p>

"I know what Minos said. I just have this bad feeling about what he wants us to do," Hercules said. Minos was a good friend to not only them, but to Xena as well. Minos was a gifted healer of not only the body, but of the mind. He had saved both Xena and Hercules' lives.

"Help me," a small, weak voice said.

"What was that?" Iolaus asked.

"Sounded like someone called out for help," Hercules said. He looked through some bushes.

"Gods have mercy on the people of Poteidaia," the voice said.

"There's nothing I can do you for you friend," Hercules grinned. The wound was too serious.

"Help the people of Poteidaia. They shouldn't suffer the same fate as Costos," the voice dropped off.

Hercules and Iolaus made their way to Costos. It was worse than what they had thought it would be. Everything was razed to the ground. Not a living thing in sight.

"Hercules, Iolaus," a voice said.

"Minos?" Iolaus said.

"I got here after it happened," Minos said. "I don't know who's responsible."

"Take it easy Minos," Hercules said. "Whoever did this, wanted to send a message to Poteidaia."

"Herc, that's Gabrielle's village," Iolaus said. "We should go there and warn them." The three men headed towards Poteidaia.

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The Only Thing in the Way

> "Xena, our advance scouts have spotted Hercules heading towards Poteidaia," the soldier said. <p>

"Hercules you said? Wonder how he heard of me so quick," Xena questioned.

"Everyone has heard of you Xena," the soldier said.

Ares appeared. "I love this. You sacked an entire village today."

"What's it to you any ways," Xena quipped.

"I'm just trying to understand this sudden bloodlust. But whatever it is, I love it," Ares said. He walked behind Xena. He pulled her back and began to massage her shoulders.

"What is after Poteidaia?" Xena asked.

"Defeat Hercules and you'll become the 'Destroyer of Nations'," Ares said.

"Hercules is the only person standing my way of achieving my destiny," Xena said. "Should there be anyone else I should be concerned about?"

"None that I'm aware of. Poteidaia is a just a village that loves peace," Ares laughed.

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A Reunion of Sorts

> "Gabrielle?" <p>

Gabrielle turned around and saw the familiar face. "Iolaus!" She walked over to Iolaus. It was good to see him. "Is Hercules with you?" "Yes. We heard about your problem," Iolaus said.

"All to serious of a problem. A warlord, don't know the name, razed a village to the ground. We are next on the list. They've already sent warnings to us," Gabrielle said. She walked along beside Iolaus.

"Where's Xena?" Iolaus asked.

"She's in Amphipolis," Gabrielle said. "It's so good to see you."

"Mind if I break this reunion up," Hercules intervened.

A blushed Iolaus turned around. "Xena's in Amphipolis."

"Xena's taught you a lot," Minos said.

"Minos?" Gabrielle asked. "What are you doing here?"

"I was going to Costos to meet up with Hercules and Iolaus. Lucky for me I was delayed. Whoever is behind this, didn't want anything left for the survivors or anyone else," Minos charged. "It was awful."

"We'll find out who's behind this," Hercules said. "I'll speak with the villagers."

"Knowing Xena, she's probably already on her way here," Iolaus smirked. "So how are you?" He and Gabrielle went for a walk. "Tired. Everything's been rough lately," Gabrielle said. "Everything."

"Tell me about," agreed Iolaus.

"I don't know anymore. I'm different. Xena's different," sighed Gabrielle.

"Everything will be fine," assured Iolaus. "Nothing will happen." Iolaus gave Gabrielle a hug.

"I don't know. I have this feeling like something is going to go wrong," Gabrielle said. Gabrielle was comforted by Iolaus. Seeing him, made her feel better.

"Want me to go to Amphipolis and get Xena?" asked Iolaus.

"Yeah." Gabrielle said. She stared off into the sky.

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"What are you doing here?" the warrior asked. The woman felt a presence appear from behind her.

"I want to watch my favorite warrior destroy a peaceful village. This should be interesting," Ares charged.

"Why are you so obsessed with this village? What is there that you want?" she questioned. "Can't be gold."

"There is nothing there in particular of interest to me, but to you there is."

"What could a peace-loving village have what I want?"

"Hercules."

"I'm going to be able to kill two birds with one stone, excellent," mused Xena.

"Commander, we found this villager by the camp." A soldier threw the villager into the tent.

The villager looked up at the Warrior Princess. "By the gods!" "What were you doing sneaking around our camp. Spying? For Hercules?"

"Xena."

"Do I know you?" She took out a dagger and held it close to his throat. "You know me, but I'm afraid I don't know you. Perhaps you

could help me out a little."

"Everyone has heard of you," the villager said. "My name is Minos."

"Minos?" She looked at him with defining stare of death. She took the dagger from his throat and held it at her side. The name meant something to her, but she couldn't do it. "Minos? Hmm, I don't know a Minos." She grabbed him again, forcing him to the ground and placed the dagger back at his throat.

"I want to serve in your army," trembled Minos. He tried to show her no fear, he knew the old Xena. He knew the old Xena thrived off of people's fear. It is what made her powerful. He didn't want to give her his fear.

"Ha! You wouldn't survive a day. Get rid of him," Xena ordered. A soldier started to drag Minos out of the tent. "No. Wait. We'll make an example out of him. Tie him up. He'll be our first kill of the day."

Minos feared for his life. He couldn't believe what was seeing. Xena, the warlord. He knew she recognized him, but she couldn't place him. The way she looked at him. She was signing his own death. Minos fought the soldier off and then escaped.

"The prisoner, he's escaped!"

"You can't do anything right," Xena said. She smashed the soldier into the ground. "Let him go."

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Chapter Three

> The Help of a God

"Gabrielle, have you seen Minos?" Hercules asked.

"Not since this afternoon. Why?" Gabrielle asked with concern. Minos wasn't the type to wonder off. Especially with the knowledge of a warlord hanging around. Especially if the warlord is as merciless as he said. "Maybe he went with Iolaus and just forgot to tell us."

"I don't like it. Something about all this, is all too familiar," Hercules warned. "You better get some sleep."

Gabrielle went back to her family's house.

"Well, well little brother. Looks like you got your hands full," Ares said.

"Ares. I suppose you are enjoying this?" Hercules asked.

"On the contrary, I'm down right appalled." Ares said. "This warlord, is going to destroy the world."

"And you aren't happy about that?" questioned Hercules. Ares always had a motive. Ares wanted to rule the world. He goes to means to do it.

"Stay away from this Hercules, if you want to live. I can't tell you who, because quite frankly I'm shocked about it myself," Ares warned.

"Watching out for me again are we?" Hercules asked. He walked passed his half-brother.

"I'm warning you Hercules. You aren't going to like what you are going to see," Ares said. He disappeared.

"If you don't want me here, then this is probably the best place for me to be," Hercules sighed. He too, decided to turn in for the night himself.

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"Ares. You sure are hanging around here a lot," Xena said. "You amaze me," Ares said. "Forget Poteidaia. There is nothing there."

"Hercules is there," Xena warned. "I want Hercules dead!"

"I know you do. But spare those villagers," Ares said.

"Since when do you care about mortals? No. I'm going into Poteidaia and taking what belongs to me. And you can't stop me," Xena warned.

"I wouldn't dream of stopping you Xena," Ares said.

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The Past

> "Promise me that if anything ever happens to me, you won't turn into a monster," Gabrielle said. "Who are you Xena? What happened to the Xena I know?" <p>

"Gabrielle, wake up," Lila said. She shook her sister awake. "You are having a bad dream."

Gabrielle slowly opened her eyes. She took a deep breath and stared at the ceiling. "What was I saying?"

"You were talking about Xena," Lila said. "You were asking her who she was."

"I was?"

"Go back to sleep. Iolaus will get Xena and bring her back," Lila

said.

Gabrielle drifted back to sleep. "Xena's dark side frightens me. I have to move on. But I could never live with someone who killed her. There would be no turning back from that."

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"You could have had it all," Ares sighed. "You killed soldiers, you even left your pesky little friend for me." Xena awoke with a sweat. Friend? What friend. I have no friends_, thought Xena.

"Promise me, if anything ever happens to me you won't turn into a monster," Gabrielle softly said. She tried to comfort her friend. She felt her friend's pain. "The only way to end the cycle of hate is through love."

"Who are you?" shouted Xena. She kept hearing this voice. She thought it was coming from outside. She looked outside her tent and saw only a few of her soldiers by a campfire. She dismissed the voices as a bad dream and went back to sleep. Or least what she called sleep.

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Welcome Amphipolis, the Home of Xena

> "I'm sorry Iolaus," Cyrene said "She hasn't arrived yet. I didn't even know she was coming. She usually sends word." <p>

"I didn't take the road here, so I would have run into her if I saw her," Iolaus commented. "She always sends word?"

"Always," Cyrene said. "Is there something wrong?"

Iolaus ignored the question. He didn't want to worry Cyrene anymore than what she already was. "I'm sure she's okay. She probably is already heading there. She has a knack for sensing trouble."

"Don't leave on an empty stomach," Cyrene said. She ushered him to a table.

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The Unlikely Allie

> "What do you want Ares?" Gabrielle asked as she retrieved water

from the well. <p>

"It all concerns Xena," Ares said.

"I won't do you bidding Ares," Gabrielle said. She kept her back turned to him.

"I'm not asking you too. I can't do that. It would be like turning your best friend against their best friend," Ares conjured.

"What are you saying?" Gabrielle asked.

"Tell me Gabrielle, how have you been feeling. Light headed?" Ares asked.

"How did you know?" Gabrielle asked. She placed the pale on the ground and turned around. _ How did he know that I was sick or been feeling sick_, she thought. "Is this some attempt to draw Xena back to you?"

"What is it you said, 'the only way to end violence is through love'?" Ares asked. "And no, quite frankly, I've given up on that."

"You are full of it," Gabrielle said. "If it's about the warlord, I'm sure Xena is on her way." She felt assured by the fact that Xena was most likely on her way and when she learned Ares was trying to sway Gabrielle. Well, Ares would be eating his own words.

"Oh Xena's on her way, alright, Gabrielle. In more ways than you can imagine," Ares said.

"See, why do you need my help?" Gabrielle asked.

"Because you are the only hope," Ares said. "If you two are connected through some force, you'll find out soon enough. Then all of this will make since to you." Ares backed away from Gabrielle and disappeared.

"When is he going to learn to just drop it?" Gabrielle asked. She picked up the pale and headed back towards the house. She heard the rustle of leaves and stopped in her tracks. "Minos?" Gabrielle dropped the pale and ran towards the fallen man. "What happened?"

"You are in danger," Minos said. He was struggling to catch his breath.

"Well, look what we found here," a soldier said. He grabbed Gabrielle. "Another one for show and tell."

Gabrielle struggled to break free, but the soldier was too strong. He clobbered her with a club and she slumped in his arms. He dragged her off back to the camp. The soldiers did the same to Minos.

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Gabrielle is Missing

> "Hercules, Gabrielle didn't return from getting the well," Lila said. <p>

Hercules finished helping a villager stack some logs on top of hut. "How long ago was that?"

"Quite some time," Lila said with concern.

"I'm sure she's okay," assured Hercules. He wasn't though. Minos disappearing and now, Gabrielle. Things weren't adding up. "Well, let's start at the well."

"The pail is here," Lila said. She looked around for her sister, but there was no sign of her.

Hercules looked down and a rock and noticed fresh blood. He turned the rock over.

"Hercules, they are coming!" a villager shouted.

Hercules and Lila returned to the village.

"You shouldn't have stayed little brother," Ares warned. "You'll not only get yourself killed, but these people as well. They don't need to die."

"Ares, stay out of this," Hercules said. "If you don't want me here, then this is probably the best place for me to be."

"Don't say I didn't warn you," Ares said. He backed away and then disappeared.

"Riders approaching!"

Hercules straightened himself and looked to the oncoming riders.

"Well if it isn't Hercules. Give us the harvest and any gold and we'll be on our way," the soldier commanded.

"Is your leader that much of a coward?" Hercules asked. "Our fearless leader will make an appearance when they see fit. And if you don't give us what we want, you'll see our leader and your throat will be cut," the soldier commanded.

"Not if I have say in it," Hercules said.

"Oh, you don't have a say in it," the soldier said. "Anyone who stands up to us will suffer the same fate as your friends here. Bring the prisoners up front."

A soldier brought up two people who were covered.

"The little one will die first," the soldier. He pulled the sack off of Gabrielle.

"It's Gabrielle!" someone cried. "They have Gabrielle!"

Hercules turned to the direction of the voice. If I let them kill Gabrielle, Xena will have my head, Hercules thought. He turned back to the soldier.

"You have until sundown to make your peace," the soldier said. "Take her back to the camp. Leave the man here." He turned to the hill. He saw the signal. "You wanted to see our leader. Well, since you don't seem intent on giving into our demands, we'll make a very bold statement. Make sure the girl sees this."

Another soldier placed Minos on the ground. He held them there.

"What are you going to do?" Hercules asked.

"Oh nothing like an execution to liven things up," the soldier said.

"It's Xena!"

Hercules felt a sudden breeze of relief. Something was telling him something was wrong with this picture.

"Xena?!" Gabrielle exclaimed.

Xena didn't notice Gabrielle. She rode passed her like she wasn't there. Never looking back.

Hercules felt strange. The knot in his stomach was beginning to grow stronger and stronger. The fact that Xena rode passed Gabrielle and didn't so much as look at her made him feel uneasy.

Gabrielle felt the same way. "Thank the Gods you are here." She was happy to see her friend.

"Shut up!" a soldier said. He smacked Gabrielle.

Hercules jolted forward.

"Ah, not yet big guy," the soldier said. He held his sword to Hercules' chest.

Xena surveyed the area. She got off Argo. She walked towards Hercules.

"Xena. Nice of you show up," Hercules said. He thought he was greeting a friend.

"Oh, I wouldn't miss this for the world Hercules," grinned Xena. She unsheathed her sword and walked towards Minos.

"Don't do this," Minos pleaded. "You can't do this Xena!"

Neither Hercules nor the villagers were making any sense of this. Slowly the villagers began backing away. They had a bad feeling about this too.

"Xena, you can't," Minos pleaded again.

"Oh, but I can. That's why it's fun," Xena said.

"Xena?! What are you doing," Hercules asked. He was too stunned to move. He couldn't believe what he was seeing.

"Xena! No!" screamed Gabrielle.

Without a moment's hesitation, Xena took her sword and raised it above her head.

"Xena! No!" screamed Gabrielle again.

Xena didn't flinch. Gabrielle's attempts to reach her failed. Xena plunged the sword into Minos' chest. With a scream and sudden, steady flow of blood, Minos collapsed to the ground.

Gabrielle fell to the ground as well.

"She killed him," whispered the villagers.

"You'll all suffer the same fate as your friend here did," Xena said. She cleaned off her sword on Minos' pants. She climbed back aboard Argo and rode off.

Hercules approached Minos. It was too late.

"We are doomed aren't we," a villager asked. "It was only a matter of time before something like this happened. What a waste."

The villagers dispersed.

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The Village Meeting

> "We should give into their demands. We can't defeat her," a villager said. <p>

"But you can," Hercules said.

"You are a friend of hers," another villager said.

"I'm a friend of Xena, not this person that rode into your village this morning. I don't know that Xena. But I know someone who does," Hercules said.

"Gabrielle?"

"But Xena has her. If she hasn't already killed her already," a villager said.

"Didn't you see what happened out there? When Xena killed Minos, something happened to Gabrielle," Hercules said. "Gabrielle is the key."

"And how are we supposed to get this message to her?" another asked.

"We don't. Gabrielle already knows," Hercules said.

"To spare us, we'll give in. But you must get Gabrielle out of there," Herodotus asked. "That warlord took her away from us, she's not going to kill her too."

"We thank you for your help Hercules, but we have to protect our families. We aren't warriors, simple people. We have to give them what they want and they'll go away," the village elder said.

The other villagers dispersed.

Hercules remained alone. "So that's why you wanted me to say out of this Ares. I bet you just happy with this aren't you?"

"Like I said earlier little brother, I'm appalled by this. I know Xena. I know she won't stray away from her path. I don't buy her 'way', but I've accepted it. You were lucky. Xena can kill you. She's in that frame of mind right now," Ares said.

"Gabrielle is the key?" Hercules asked.

"Oh yes. See, only Gabrielle can defeat Xena. Only, if either kills the other, they both die. You saw what happened to Gabrielle out there. When she killed that guy, it was like a part of her dying as well. Every time Xena kills an innocent person, a part of Gabrielle dies. Xena only grows stronger. If she hurts you, she gets stronger. It is some other force driving her. I told her to come here to see she was for real. I was shocked to see her excited about this," Ares said.

"So you are switching sides yet again?" Hercules asked.

"I don't want Xena to die. Perhaps it is that hope she'll come back to me," Ares said.

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Chapter Four

>

Who Are You?

> "Get up!" Xena ordered. She pulled the smaller woman up.
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"Xena?" Gabrielle questioned. The pain in her head still resided. "We have to get out here."

"Who is the we? I can leave whenever I want, you on the other hand well, you have other plans," said Xena with an evil grin. "You see, you'll be the second example. My information tells me you are some importance to that village."

"Xena?"

"How do you know my name? You kept screaming it out there. I'm afraid you have me at a single disadvantage you know me, but I don't know you," Xena said. "No matter."

"You saved my life more times than I can count," Gabrielle said. She had to find some common ground. Something that would trigger something in Xena's mind.

"I saved your life?" chuckled Xena. "I saved your life. Hear that boys, I saved her life. Nice try blondie. You are still going to die. Doesn't matter if your village gives us what we want."

"And what is that Xena? We don't have gold. Very little harvest," Gabrielle shouted.

"Hercules. And now that I think of it, just another village to conquer," Xena said.

"Doing Ares bidding again I see," Gabrielle said. "You know, he wanted me to side with him and stop you." Gabrielle backed up closer to the wall.

"I don't care about Ares," Xena said. "Watch her, make sure she doesn't go anywhere."

"Who are you? What happened to the Xena I know?" Gabrielle asked. It was one last plea to try to get through to her friend she thought she knew. Gabrielle sighed. She could wonder what was going to happen to her now.

"You know now don't you?" Ares asked.

"I know that, that is not Xena. What is going on?" Gabrielle asked with frustration. "Why is she doing this?"

"She's not doing much of anything. Well, she's doing what comes naturally to people like her," Ares said.

"You said I was the only hope. What did you mean by that," Gabrielle asked.

"Only you can defeat her," Ares said.

"Hercules could," Gabrielle replied. She thought Hercules will somehow figure out a way to get her and Xena out of this.

"He could. He knows you are the key. Keep trying to talk to her. It's what you do best. The Gods know you are annoying enough when you talk," Ares remarked.

"How am I supposed to talk to her?" Gabrielle asked. "She won't even look at me, let alone give the time to talk. She'll kill me and not think twice about it. She's tried to do it before and well â€œ."

"You have to prevent her from killing you. If she kills you, she'll die too. Maybe not right away, but she will. If she kills you, she'll be devastated. You are still apart of her. Something is controlling

her," Ares said.

"Why are you so willing to help. I thought you would be proud your Warrior Princess returned."

"All in the past. I know I can't sway her from her path. She swayed to easily. She either allowed herself or something forced her. Whatever the case maybe, she is a liability because she still has the goodness streak in her," Ares warned. "She saved your life again, and she didn't know it."

"What do you mean?" questioned Gabrielle. Ares was making sense. They way she had been feeling. And when Xena killed Minos, she got very ill. It was like someone stabbing you with a thousand daggers all over your body.

"You were to be the first one killed," Ares said. "You are on your own."

"Shut up in there. Crazy bitch. Talking to yourself," the guard yelled through the door.

"Have to get out of here," Gabrielle said. "There has to be a ¢." She looked down and saw a rope. "If I can somehow ¢."

"I thought you might try to escape," Xena said. She entered the cell. "Ah you were right. Ares was trying to stop me. Whatever is in your village must be mighty important to keep me from getting it."

"There is something important there," Gabrielle said.

Xena struck a curious eyebrow. "What is so important?"

"Eternity," Gabrielle said.

"Eternity?"

"If you kill those people ¢ if you kill me ¢ you'll die," Gabrielle said. Be honest with her, she thought. Be honest with her and she may let you live or go.

"We all die eventually. We just never know how or when," remarked Xena. She moved in closer to Gabrielle.

Don't give her your fear, thought Gabrielle.

"You don't fear me do you?" Xena asked.

"Should I?"

"I can't figure you out. You know me, yet I don't know you," Xena said.

"Take me with you. I want to be like you," Gabrielle said. "I'm not who my parents that I was."

"It's hard proving you are a different person," replied Xena. "Why would I take you with me? What possible of use could you be to me?"

"I'm willing to die for people I care about," Gabrielle said.

"You are willing to die for those pathetic villagers. You are stronger than I thought," Xena said. She proceeded to walk out of the prison cell.

"I can be of valuable use to you. I'm a good talker," Gabrielle said.
"I'm a bard."

"A bard you say. It would be nice to have someone document my triumphs. After killing Hercules, I'll set my sights on the Amazons and the Centaurs."

"No. You are friends with the Amazons," warned Gabrielle. "I'm the Queen of the Amazons." She knew she was no longer Queen, but Xena wouldn't know that. And if Xena knew she had a Amazon Queen, then she'll most likely protect her. Amazons fetched good slavery money. Even though Xena was against slavery, she wasn't above getting money.

"I have no friends. The sooner you learn that, the longer you might live," Xena sternly said. "Even if you are the Queen, you'll be a nice prize."

"Take me with you," Gabrielle pleaded. "If you don't think I've killed before. You are wrong. I have. I've killed my child," a somber voice said. "I've killed out of anger and hatred."

"Oh you have, have you?" Xena said.

"Yes. And I'll do it again if I have too."

"Better not make promises you may have to live up to little girl."

Xena left the prison cell.

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Chapter Five

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> Payment Time

> "It's almost sundown," the villager said to Hercules. "Are you sure your plan will work." <p>

"She'll most likely have Gabrielle with her. If Gabrielle manages to pick up on the signal to escape, Xena will hopefully go after her. You know what to do," Hercules said.

"I don't know if going after Gabrielle is such a good idea," another villager said.

"Gabrielle is a good catch for Xena. Amazons fetch a good slavery price," Hercules said. "Especially their Queens."

"But Gabrielle is no longer the Queen," remarked Lila.

"Xena doesn't know that," Hercules said. "At least I hope she doesn't

know that."

Lila went back with her family, in the safety of a temple with the rest of the villagers. The wagons were positioned properly to provide protection for the villagers.

"We have to get Xena and Gabrielle by the cave," Hercules ordered.

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Getting Paid

> "I don't like this. They are up to something," Janus said. <p>

"Of course they are Janus. You didn't think they would just turn over the wagons to us without a fight did you? Hercules probably wants to us near the cave so he can dump rocks on us," Xena mused. "Bring the girl up front," Xena ordered.

"The name is Gabrielle," Gabrielle said. She was struggling with the soldier.

"You said you were willing to die for this villagers?" Xena asked. Gabrielle nodded in agreement. She looked down onto her village.

"Well, you aren't going to die today Gabrielle. Not if I have anything to say about it. You are more valuable to me alive, especially if you are the Queen of the Amazons," Xena stated. She looked back to her soldiers, "If they give you trouble, kill them all. Take no prisoners."

"Yes commander," Janus said. He saluted his leader and rode to the head of the cavalry.

Gabrielle looked to Xena with a grim expression, "They won't get away."

"That's why we are staying here. See that cave, with the rocks on top â€œ," Xena said pointing to the cave.

"They are going to try to maneuver your army over there then crush the army with little loss of life for them," Gabrielle commented.

Xena looked down in amazement.

"I know the tactic," Gabrielle commented. "Take out your opponent before they take out you."

"Get moving," Xena ordered. Xena never looked back.

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The Taking of Poteidaia

> "Where is Xena?" a villager asked Hercules. <p>

"I don't know. Xena's smart. She is an exceptional commander. Not afraid to send her men into battle and watch them die a worthless cause. I don't like this. She know's something is up," Hercules commented.

"Hercules!" Iolaus shouted. He jumped off the horse and ran to Hercules. "Xena never showed up in Amphipolis."

"I know," Hercules said. "Iolaus, get ready."

"Where is your commander at?" Hercules asked.

"You were foolish in trying to fool her Hercules. She smelled your trap a mile away," Janus said. "Just give us the wagons and we'll be on our way. We'll stay away from the cave if it is all the same to you."

"No. I want your commander," Hercules said.

"Janus!" Agrilius shouted. He came riding into the village like Hades on his chariot. Agrilius whispered something into Janus' ear. Agrilius moved to the side of Janus.

"Well, well, well. Looks she already figured you'd pull a stunt like this. Take the loot wagons, but don't kill anyone," Janus said.

"Don't kill anyone?"

"She?" Iolaus asked.

"Long story," Hercules said. "Get ready to fight Iolaus."

"We aren't here to fight," Janus argued. "Just give us the loot and we'll be on our way."

"No commander, no wagon," Hercules ordered. He pulled Janus down from his horse.

"Get the woman and children to the cave," someone shouted.

Just then, the rocks that were atop the cave came tumbling down.

"The cave, it's blocked," a villager shouted.

Janus gave a laugh. "Looks like your plan failed Hercules. Pull out. She was right, this isn't worth the trouble." Janus vaulted back onto his horse and rode off back towards the camp.

"You can tell your leader, I'll be there at every corner," Hercules shouted.

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No Battle Today

> "What is going on?" Gabrielle asked. "Why aren't they fighting?"
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"I told them not too. No point in those villagers dying," Xena said.

"You never wanted anything did you?" Gabrielle asked. She looked at Xena.

Xena continued to look down onto the village. Xena ignored the question. She saw her army pulling out and decided to head back the camp.

Gabrielle continued to watch Xena. The warlord Xena, never would have pulled out. This Xena did. Gabrielle was starting to make sense of what Ares said when he told her Xena was in trouble. Gabrielle knew it was up to her.

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Seems Like Old Times, Doesn't It?

> "So it was Xena?" asked Iolaus in disbelief. "She killed Minos in cold blood?" <p>

"Yes. I've never seen that look in her eyes before. Not even when she plotted to kill me. There was this evil. Complete evil," Hercules said. He finished dressing a wound on a villager. Hercules got up and started to check on the other villagers.

"At least they didn't get anything." Iolaus said.

"She didn't want them too. She ordered her men to not fight us," Hercules said. "They won't be back."

"But what about Gabrielle?" a concerned Iolaus asked. Xena was misfiring and Gabrielle was in the middle of it.

"Gabrielle isn't in danger. Xena pulled her army out because she didn't want to fight. She didn't want to kill these people," Hercules pointed out.

"So now what?" Iolaus asked.

"We do what we would normally do," Hercules said. "Go after her."

"But what would prevent her from killing us?" Iolaus asked.

"She won't."

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I'm a Amazon Queen, Really

> "Bring the girl to me," Xena ordered. <p>

The soldier nodded and left the tent.

"You don't have to be so rough," Gabrielle said. She struggled with the soldier. She broke free.

The soldier reacted as he would normally with any other prisoner. He was going to teach her some respect.

"No!" Xena shouted. She grabbed the soldier's arm. "If anyone will be knocking respect into her, it will be me!"

The soldier stepped back from Gabrielle.

"How thoughtful," Gabrielle sighed.

"You said you were an Amazon Queen?" Xena asked.

"Yes."

"You sure don't look like one," Xena remarked.

"Looks aren't everything," Gabrielle replied. "It's part of the cover."

"Cover?"

"Yes," Gabrielle answered. Gabrielle had to think quick on feet now.

"What are you doing here?" Xena asked.

"A friend of mine once told me that in order to defeat your enemy without getting yourself killed is to learn everything you could about them," Gabrielle said. "That's what I'm doing."

Xena let out a slight chuckle. "The Amazons aren't known to just sack any village for no reason. They are too proud to do that."

"I'm not apart of those Amazons," Gabrielle said. Gabrielle took a deep breath.

"Renegade? You don't?"

"I fooled you didn't I? I fooled Hercules," Gabrielle said. "They way I see it, we can help each other."

"You aren't a good liar," Xena said.

"What do you mean," choked Gabrielle. She tried to control her fear. She didn't recognize the person behind those blue eyes.

"You don't need my help. Nor do I need yours. Nor would I ever give you help. The Renegade Amazons are one of the reasons why the Nation broke up," Xena said.

"Not those Renegades â€". Gabrielle was trying anything at this point.

"Most of the Renegades are dead or they converted back into the tribes," Xena said.

"Alright, I lied. I'll admit it. I lied. The real truth is, I'm from your future. I was sent back to save you from destroying your future life," Gabrielle pleaded. "The thing about being an Amazon Queen, is true though. Or least I was." What on earth did I just say to her, Gabrielle thought. She was willing try anything at this point.

"You aren't now?"

"Um. No. The Regent Queen Ephiny was killed by the Romans. I came back to rule as Queen and well, when it was over â€" I relinquished the title," stuttered Gabrielle.

"The Romans? Hmm. Interesting. I've heard of an Ephiny."

Gabrielle felt as if her heart was about to jump out her chest.
Finally, a name she recognized, Gabrielle thought.

"She tried to prevent me from killing the person â€". Xena stopped in mid sentence and looked at Gabrielle straight in the eyes. "You!"

"Me?" Gabrielle asked, astoundingly. She knew where Xena was going with this. Ephiny's name didn't bring back good memories, only the bad. The really bad.

"I thought I had killed you," Xena said.

"Yes. You tried, at least. But we fell over a cliff," Gabrielle sputtered. Her fear was starting to get the best of her. "And we ended up in some sort of strange world."

"And suppose now you are going to tell me everything turned out to be just fine, right?"

"Yes," Gabrielle said. "But it didn't happen overnight."

"Of course not," Xena said. She gave Gabrielle a strange look and then grabbed her. "You fear me now, don't you?"

Gabrielle shook her head yes.

"You didn't before," Xena said. She continued to hold a grip on

Gabrielle. It continued to get stronger.

Gabrielle started to have difficulty to breath. "I do now."

Xena let go of Gabrielle. Gabrielle fell to the ground, grasping for air. "Get up!" Xena commanded. Gabrielle slowly complied. She looked into Xena's eyes. "Guards!" The guards came in. "Take her!"

"You felt her pain, didn't you?" Ares asked.

"Traitor!" Xena shouted. She walked passed Ares.

"I'm a God Xena, I play both sides of the fence when it suits my purpose. That feeling you have right now, is called guilt. A person in your position doesn't have the time nor the capacity to feel guilt. It'll get you killed," Ares said.

"First you try help me. Then you try to stop me with the help of that pathetic Amazon. Then you try to help me again. I think I'll just ignore you altogether and make my life a whole lot easier," Xena said.

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"Who is that girl?" a voice asked.

"She represents goodness and light," Xena said. Xena's train of thought was shattered when she saw a vision of her death, including this person claiming to be her friend. "Romans."

"You are the best thing to ever happen to me," Xena said.

"I love you Xena," Gabrielle said.

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The Vision

> "What are you going to do to me," Gabrielle asked. <p>

"That depends on what you can tell me," Xena replied. She wanted to know more about this vision. Her expression was that of confusion.

Gabrielle saw the expression. She hadn't seen that expression since Xena had told her about the vision. Of all the things she had to remember, why did it have to be that vision, Gabrielle thought to herself. "You had a vision didn't you?"

"You seem to know me. And it feels like I should know you since we are obviously crucified by Romans together," Xena replied. She bowed

her head down.

Gabrielle felt the pain. The confusion. The anguish. "It's true too."

"How do you know?" Xena asked.

Gabrielle didn't want to deluge the truth any further, but she knew she had too. She wouldn't let it rest. "Because it's already happened." Gabrielle hung her head down.

"Xena! Hercules is coming," a soldier shouted.

Xena's mood changed. It was back to business as usual. She gave Gabrielle one final look, then walked out the door to meet Hercules.

"He's come in peace," the soldier remarked.

"What do you want," Xena asked. She walked past Hercules.

"The Xena I know wouldn't have walked away from a fight," Hercules said. "Where is Gabrielle?"

"Tucked away," Xena said. Why is Gabrielle so important to him, she asked herself.

"If you give me Gabrielle, you and your army can just walk away," Hercules offered.

"You just said yourself I don't walk away from a fight. Well, there is no fight to walk away from, now is there. The girl is somehow, don't know yet, important to me. I'll keep her for the time being," Xena said. "Then is no other option," Hercules said.

"I won't fight you," Xena said.

"Why?" Hercules asked.

"It wouldn't seem right," Xena said. "As long as you stay away from me, Gabrielle is safe."

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She Won't Be Back

> "What have you done to her Ares," Hercules asked. <p>

"She sure is misfiring," Ares laughed.

"And you find that amusing?"

"Well, not all of it. You know, I'd never thought I'd hear myself this, but I don't want her," Ares said.

"It is up to Gabrielle to finish the job," Hercules said, walking

past his brother. He never looked up to acknowledge him.

"You are right. Only that irritating blonde can save her," Ares said.
"Stay away from this Hercules. You won't like what is at the root of it."

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"She won't harm her," Hercules said. "When Xena puts her mind to something, it'll get accomplished. Whatever it maybe, it'll be done. If she doesn't want to harm Gabrielle, she won't. She's very protective of her, even if with the way she is right now."

"She won't be back?"

"She won't be coming back," Hercules said.

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Chapter Six

>
 The Prodigal Sister and Daughter

> "I still say she should be held accountable for what she's done," Herodotus proclaimed. "She took our daughter away." <p>

"Gabrielle left on her own free will. Gabrielle left because that is who she is," Hecuba pleaded. "Gabrielle probably talked Xena into letting her stay. Gabrielle has away of doing that."

"Father, Hercules assured us Gabrielle is safe," Lila said.

"I still don't like it," Herodotus said.

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Lila sat alone in her room, thinking about her sister. She thought of how much Gabrielle has changed. Gabrielle was no longer the innocent villager. She was stronger now. She couldn't figure out what was going on. The Xena she heard Gabrielle talk so much about was not the same person in their village. For some reason, Lila knew Gabrielle was safe. She didn't know why, but that she was.

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"I'm going to go after her," Herodotus said. He grabbed a sword from the mantel.

"You can't," his wife pleaded.

"And why not?"

"Because what's to stop her from killing you? You've misjudged Xena from the very beginning. She saved us remember? That man was going to take us. She even convinced him to ignore us and for what reason? Nothing other than it was the right thing to do," Hecuba stated.
"You've never given Xena the time. I did and I learned a lot. Not about her, but about my own daughter. It was Gabrielle that has kept her doing good."

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Evil Will Defeat Itself

> "Are you sure Gabrielle is safe?" Iolaus asked. <p>

"She's safe. Xena made a sub-conscious decision to let this village go. For some reason, she didn't allow herself to go back," Hercules said.

"So what if she goes on the rampage again," Iolaus said.

"That's the thing Iolaus, she didn't. When her army attacked Costos, she was no where near her army. She was back, watching her army. She watched them, something prevented her from fighting then. Just like today, she couldn't lead an attack," Hercules said.

"I'm still not convinced," Iolaus said.

"Have faith in Gabrielle. Evil will defeat itself," Hercules said.

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Bard, Warrior Bard

> "Come on Gabrielle think. You are the Warrior Bard of Poteidaia. Use your stories. You've said things that have made some sort of contact with her. She's trying to understand, but something is blocking it," Gabrielle softly said. Gabrielle sat quietly in her cell. "I have to figure out a way â€". " <p>

"You have company â€" Get in there!" a guard shouted.

"Lila!" Gabrielle said, surprised. "What are you doing here?"

"I brought you this," Lila said. She took a backpack out from under her dress. "I had you to make sure you were alright."

"You shouldn't have come," Gabrielle said.

"She won't hurt you, will she?" Lila asked.

"The last time we spoke, we didn't part on the greatest of good times. It's like she knows, but she doesn't. She's fighting it," Gabrielle said. She looked through her pack.

"You can get out of here, can't you?" Lila asked.

"Not without Xena. If I leave, she comes with me," Gabrielle said.

"And you have a plan for that?"

"I'm working on it."

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> **Going Back to Poteidaia?**

> "Are we going back there?" Janus asked. Janus was about the height of Gabrielle. He wasn't a good warrior, but he was a great strategist. <p>

"No. There is nothing there. Not anymore," Xena said. "Something doesn't fit right."

Janus left the tent.

"Another chance. You brought me back to defeat me Xena. The problem is you also brought back my powers. What's the matter Xena? Having trouble fighting me in my spiritual state? Don't â€œ I'm real â€œ formed from the evil of the earth. And I'm a much better fighter than you ever dreamed."

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The Journey to Nowhere

> "Get up," ordered the guard. "We are moving out." <p>

"Where are they taking us?" Lila asked.

"I don't know," Gabrielle replied.

The guard opened the door and Lila and Gabrielle left the cell.

"Who is that?" Xena asked Agrilius.

"Another person we found snooping around the camp," Agrilius said.

"Why wasn't I told?"

"A minor oversight," Agrilius choked.

"Let her go. She's not important to us," Xena said. She rode ahead.

"What's going on?" Gabrielle asked.

"Your friend here, gets to go," the guard said, untying the ropes.

"I won't go unless she goes with me," Lila demanded.

"Lila, go. It'll be alright. I've figured it out," assured Gabrielle. The only thing she had figured out is that Xena wasn't Xena. And that she was the only person to fix the situation. Something was going on, that was for sure.

"Come on -- Get out of here," the guard demanded.

"Put her on a horse. And untie her," Janus said.

"What for?"

"I don't know. Just do it," Janus ordered. He rode to the back of the line.

Gabrielle watched Janus ride to back of the army.

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"Where are we going?" Gabrielle asked.

"Nowhere," Xena replied. "Wherever we are going, there will be trouble."

Gabrielle sighed and rode along side with someone she thought was her friend. Xena remained quiet.

It was dark when the army finally stopped for the night. It wasn't safe to travel at night.

With no idea of what was to happen to next, Gabrielle decided to try something. Something she couldn't do and hasn't been able to do for quite sometime. There was something about Xena's behavior that was familiar to her.

She slumped down on the ground. "Xena, if you are out there, you have to help me. I don't know this person. I don't know what else to do. We have to do this together, it's the only way. I know you aren't

here."

"You. Xena wants to see you," the guard said. "Come on." He muttered something to himself. He escorted Gabrielle to a cave.

Janus was close by, listening to Gabrielle. He knew what was going to happen to her. Eventually, Xena was going to kill her and he wasn't about to let that happen. He followed the guard and Gabrielle into the cave. He knew this person didn't have to die. This person shouldn't die.

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The Present Future

> "Tell me, can you see the future?" Xena asked. <p>

Gabrielle slowly walked towards Xena. "No. They say the Fates have our futures mapped out for us. We can't change it. I'd rather not know my future."

"That's the funny thing about destiny, you can't change it," Xena said. "Once you know it, you can't change it. No matter how hard you try."

"And what does your destiny say, Xena?"

"That I will be able to complete my mission, finally. One of the two people that were truly stopping me is now gone. And the other â€œ."

Gabrielle moved back. Janus moved in for a closer look.

Xena turned around and ferociously grabbed Gabrielle by the neck.

"What has she told you about me? This person, is going to die because of you. Do you want the blood of an innocent on your hands. It will be your fault."

Gabrielle looked in Xena's eyes. "Altis!"

Janus stepped out the shadows. "Let her go."

"You?" Xena said. She was distracted by this rude interruption. She pointed her sword towards Janus.

Janus swallowed hard. "Let her go," Janus demanded. He took a deep breath. He knew he just made a terrible effort to try to save this young woman he didn't know.

"Since when did you become the physical type? Doesn't matter now." Xena dropped Gabrielle. She walked towards Janus. Janus stepped back a few steps then stopped

"Don't. She'll kill you," Gabrielle said. She was struggling to breath.

Xena moved around Janus. Janus remained still, eying the shiny weapon on Xena's side.

Gabrielle struggled to stand up, watching the two warriors exchange looks. Gabrielle looked around for a weapon of some sorts. She couldn't find any.

"What's the matter? To afraid you might die?" coerced Xena.

"No. Not afraid to die," Janus said.

"Good. Because you'll be dealt with later," Xena said. Xena firmly planted a kick into Janus' chest, sending him backwards into the cave wall. He fell to the ground, unconscious.

Gabrielle knew she was next. She searched again for a weapon, she found a long piece of wood. She grabbed it and charged the warrior. She knew she was no match, and that this was pointless. She knew she couldn't hold a candle to Xena in a battle. She hoped that maybe Janus would regain consciousness in time.

Xena deflected the charge. She grabbed the weapon from the smaller woman and used it against her. The weapon broke into two pieces across Gabrielle's back. Gabrielle screamed out in pain. Gabrielle tried to grab at least one of the pieces of wood, but Xena's grip was too strong. Xena grabbed Gabrielle by the throat one more time. "Your future lives. It all ends here."

Janus was slowly regaining consciousness. Janus was awakening to a brutal fight between two unfairly matched opponents. Janus rose up and charged Xena, grabbing the shiny weapon. "Rahhhhhh!!!!" screamed Janus.

It was a case of being in the wrong place at the wrong time. When Janus charged Xena, Gabrielle instinctively grabbed a hold of Janus, who grabbed a hold of Xena. All three went tumbling through a crater in the cave.

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"What happened?" Janus asked, rubbing his head.

"I don't know. I fell down a hole and â€", " Gabrielle said. "Yeah. What is it with you and holes â€", " Janus said, groggily.

Gabrielle stunned, turned to face Janus. "What did you just say?"

"What is it with you and â€". "

Gabrielle crawled to Janus. "I don't believe it." She reached out her right hand and touched his face. She almost started to cry.

Janus, surprised, "Don't believe what?" He was confused by this girl's excitement. "I just saved your life and all you can say is, 'I don't believe it'." He pushed her hand away.

"Thank you," Gabrielle said. Gabrielle acted as if she had just found her long lost puppy.

"What did you do?" Xena asked.

Janus got up, the shiny weapon in hand. "It's not what I did. It's what you did."

"The chakram," Gabrielle said. She watched Janus get up and slowly walk over to Xena.

Xena looked down at her side and noticed her prized weapon was in Janus' hand. Xena grabbed a hold of Janus and raised him off the ground. "I don't believe it."

"Believe this," Janus said. Janus head butted Xena.

Xena dropped Janus and she fell to the ground. Janus grabbed Xena's sword then ran over and grabbed Gabrielle. The two ran off into the forest.

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How Could You?

> "Xena?" Gabrielle asked. Her face lit up. It is her, Gabrielle thought to herself. <p>

"Yeah," Xena said.

"It worked."

"Gabrielle â€“ Of all the people you could have sent me too â€“ why did it have to be this guy. Joxer would have been a much better choice," Janus said.

"Tell me you don't mean that," chuckled Gabrielle. "It's Alti? How did she? How did you â€“ Look at the bright side, you may not be in the best of a warrior's body, but at least you have your abilities," Gabrielle said.

"That's the problem. I may have my abilities, but I have his as well. And Alti well â€“ she not only has mine, but hers as well. It's like trying to fight myself, times a hundred. The odds were against me from the beginning."

"Naima said that we'd always be able to defeat her," Gabrielle assured her friend.

"Naima didn't think Alti would be able to pull a stunt like this," Janus said. "She had help, Gabrielle. She had help."

"So what do we do?" Gabrielle asked.

Janus looked around. "I don't know."

"You had me worried," Gabrielle said. "Why didn't you just say something?"

"I couldn't. I'm just sorry Minos had to die because of this," Janus said. "You couldn't protect him?"

"If I protected him, you would have died," Janus said. "I was using what energy I had left to protect you and your village and Hercules. Ares, surprised me though." Janus unsheathed his sword and handed to Gabrielle. He then sheathed Xena's sword.

"How are we going to fix what you've â€“" Alti has done?" She looked at the sword, then tossed it the ground. She wanted no part of swordplay.

Janus shrugged his shoulders. "We better get going if we want to stay ahead of her and find a way out of here. There is something familiar about this place."

Janus and Gabrielle continued to walk through the forest.

>

Chapter Seven

>
 Going After Xena

> "Her army is there," Iolaus said, pointing to a small clearing near a cave. <p>

"Looks like something is wrong too," Hercules said.

"Want to crash the party?" Iolaus asked.

"Why should they have all the fun? Let's be discreet about it though," Hercules said.

"Good idea."

Hercules and Iolaus approached the camp, quietly. They entered the cave.

"Looks like some type of struggle happened here," Iolaus said.

Hercules looked down a crater in the cave. He took a torch and looked down, he couldn't see anything but darkness.

"What did you find?" Iolaus asked his friend.

"I don't know, but we are about to find out," Hercules said. He climbed on the edge of the crater."

"You aren't just going to jump down there are you?" Before Iolaus

could finish his sentence, Hercules jumped down. Iolaus followed.

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><p> **I Don't Think We Are In Greece Anymore**

> "Where are we," Gabrielle asked. <p>

"I don't know," Janus replied. "But I got a strange feeling â€". "

"Whoaaaa!" Hercules screamed. He landed in front of Gabrielle.

"Hercules!" Gabrielle said, surprised.

"Nice of you drop in," Janus said.

"You!" Hercules said.

"Her-cu-leeeeees," jested Iolaus. He landed beside his friend.

"Hercules, wait," Gabrielle explained. She looked at Janus. "This is Janus. Now, despite what you've seen of him earlier, I assure you he is on our side." This is going to be tough to explain, Gabrielle thought.

"Really?" Hercules asked. "I think I've had about enough surprises for one day."

"You and me both. It isn't exactly everyday you wake up to find yourself, well, pre-occupied with taking over the world," Janus said. "And you had no intention of doing it in the first place. Then my best friend decides to put me here." She shot a look over at Gabrielle. It was playful evil look.

"Xena?" Iolaus asked. "But you â€". "

"Look so different? Ask Gabrielle to explain. Look, we don't have much time. Gabrielle will explain to Iolaus. I'll explain it to Hercules," Janus said.

Hercules and Janus sat down on a tree stump. Iolaus and Gabrielle went for a walk.

"What is going on?" Hercules asked. He was glad that it was Xena. The Xena he knew. But the features were quite different.

"An evil Shamaness, named Alti has managed to take over my body," Janus said. "She wants to complete her mission of destroying the world. At one time, I was her weapon, now her enemy. She couldn't have come back without help. We have to take out that help, before we can defeat her."

"Do you know who this help is?"

"No. I don't even have an idea," replied Janus. Janus hung his head low, "I'm just sorry that Minus had to die."

"It wasn't you that killed him," Hercules said. There wasn't anything he could say to her to take away the feeling she had. He wanted to know more about Alti. "Where do you know Alti from?"

Janus paused for a moment. "She was exiled from the Amazons for practicing witchcraft. It was her that said I would become 'The Destroyer of Nations.' It was her that said my son would never know his father or his mother."

"The first never came true though," Hercules said.

"Because I didn't want to be. Something happened. I had the Amazons and the Centaurs, but I let them go," Janus said.

"What do you want to do. How do we fix what this Alti has done?"

"You and Iolaus do nothing. It is up to me and Gabrielle to fix what she's done," replied Janus.

"Are you sure about that?"

"It's not your fight."

"If my friends are involved, I make it my fight."

"This time, you can't be involved. Alti is powerful. You'll learn things you shouldn't learn. I should know," Janus said.

"You can't fight destiny Xena. I think you know that by now," Hercules said.

"It is my destiny to fight Alti, every time."

"You two ready?" Iolaus asked. "Did I interrupt anything?"

"No. No, everything's fine," Janus said. She looked over at Hercules.

"You okay?" Gabrielle asked, looking at the person that was very much her best friend, but looked so totally different. "I don't think I'll get used to this."

"You'll have too. At least for now."

Hercules and Iolaus went on ahead.

"How are we going to defeat Alti?"

"The only way we can," replied Janus

"The Mehndi?"

"Yes. We take her back," Janus said.

"She won't fall the same trick twice. She's too smart for that," answered Gabrielle.

"We'll make it work. We have no other alternative at this point," Janus said. "In the mean time, we have to figure out where we are at and why we are here and just how to get out of here."

Iolaus approached them, "You two coming or do you want to enjoy the view longer?"

"We're coming," replied Gabrielle. She walked ahead of her friend.

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><p> **Finding the Way Home**

> "If I'm not mistaken, we are still in Greece," Hercules said.
"Look." He pointed towards the Acropolis in Athens. <p>

"Athens?" Gabrielle asked. "Why Athens?"

"Why not Corinth? Thessaly? There are any number of places we could have ended up in. All of which point back to the same question, why?" Janus said. He joined Hercules up on the ridge.

"What do you think?" Hercules asked.

Janus didn't say word.

"I don't know you about you three, but I'm starving," Iolaus said. He raced down the hill.

"At least he still has his appetite," Hercules replied. He walked down the hill behind his long time friend.

"Yeah," Gabrielle said. She looked at Janus. "Does he have a family?"

"Yes," Janus answered.

"What will happen to him when we take Alti back?"

"I hope nothing," replied Janus. "You go on ahead."

"No. You are going to go and find her. Xena, you don't even know where to start looking for her," Gabrielle said. "You need to eat."

"I'll eat when I want too," argued Janus. "Go."

Gabrielle saw there was no use in arguing this any further. When Xena put her mind to something, she usually accomplished the task without a problem. It was focus. She started to walk down the hill, she turned around and walked back up the hill. "You are always trying to protect me. I can protect myself Xena. I protected myself against â€", " argued Gabrielle before she realized she made a bad statement.

" â€" against me," Janus said, finishing her friend's comment.

"Your body does me justice Xena. I can walk into a village and I get respect. People are afraid of me and they don't even know the half of it," Alti replied. "I knew we would get the chance to fight again. Let me even the odds up for you." Alti grabbed a hold of both Gabrielle and Xena.

Whirls of bright colors and whooshing air surrounding the three people. Suddenly, they found themselves surrounded by the bright streams light and were transported to somewhere.

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><p> **Let's Get Ready to Rumble**

> Xena and Gabrielle awoke to find themselves in a forest not far from Amphipolis. <p>

"Xena? You're back," Gabrielle asked. She noticed Xena's blank stare. "I mean you are back in your body."

"I know," agreed Xena. "I know where we are at."

"I think you should get ready. We are about ready to have company," Gabrielle said. She nudged Xena in the side.

"Give us your money," demanded the bandit.

Xena nonchalantly rose up. She approached the leader. "And what if I don't?"

"We take it from you," the bandit said. "Either way, we get your money. And just so you know, the name is Degas."

"I suggest you find a new way of getting money. This method isn't working out," Xena said. She took her sword from her scabbard.

Feeling a fight about ready to start, Gabrielle looked down in the dirt and pick up a conveniently placed staff. She thought it was weird at first, but she did what came naturally to her. "Save some for me"

Xena looked over at her and shrugged it off.

Before Xena could ever make her first move, Degas had plotted his first attack. He had many to choose from. He chose a disabling attack first. Degas envisioned a tree slamming into his opponent.

The force of the blow, sent Xena backwards. She did a backwards somersault, landing in complete, unbearable pain. She struggled to her feet.

Gabrielle was next. She was holding her own against the remaining bandits. When she had finished them, she looked over and noticed her friend struggling to get up. She turned to the one who called himself

Degas.

Degas plotted his next blow, this time against Gabrielle. "The nails in the ankles will do."

Gabrielle fell to the ground in pain. She was screaming.

This gave Xena cause to rise up. "Alti!"

"Xena, you should know better," replied Alti. She tried a different method of attack. She flew towards Xena, knocking her to the ground. "Back to basics." She grabbed Xena and raised her off the ground. "This is what is going to happen to your friends after I've killed you."

Xena broke free of Alti's grasp and fell to the ground. She did a roundhouse kick to knock Alti off balance. Xena got up and started landing punches into Alti. Alti deflected what she could, but Xena was too powerful for her.

Alti again grabbed Xena. "Something to remember me by." She made Xena see her past. More specifically, what she did to Gabrielle after Hope had killed Solan. "You destroyed her." She released Xena and dropped her to the ground.

Xena took out a dagger that she had always placed in her boot and threw it at Alti. Alti caught it.

"We aren't finished yet Xena," Alti said. She disappeared into the forest.

"Xena?" Gabrielle said. She crawled over to her friend.

"You okay?" Xena asked Gabrielle.

"I'm fine. What did she show you?" asked Gabrielle.

"Nothing," answered Xena. She helped Gabrielle up. "You'll be fine."

"It hurts," replied Gabrielle. She was limping.

"You just imagined it." She helped Gabrielle sit down on a tree stump.

"What about you?" Gabrielle asked.

"I said I was fine," Xena replied. "We'll stay here for the night. In the morning, we'll head to Amphipolis. If what has happened I think happened, we shouldn't have anything to worry about."

"I'm not certain I follow," Gabrielle said.

"Alti let me defeat her. Degas, the bandit, him and his band tried to rob me before all of this happened. It was really Alti. Someone brought her back," Xena said. "It wasn't us. She wants something from here. Something she didn't get because she didn't fully take over me."

"I think we should find this Janus," Gabrielle said. "Does that name

mean anything to you?"

Xena shook her head no. "I'll get some more firewood. By the way, where did the staff come from?"

Gabrielle turned to looked at Xena. "I don't know. I looked down and there it was. It looks like the one Ephiny gave me." Her voice dropped off. She remembered her fallen friend.

"Hmm," sighed Xena. She went off to go find some firewood.

Xena returned to find her friend had fallen asleep. She cracked a small smile and built the fire. She took her blanket and cover Gabrielle up with it. She sat next to her best friend, sword in hand. She knew Alti wouldn't be back, at least not yet. Alti was up to something.

>

Chapter Eight

>
 Going Home

> "So let me get this straight, you think that Alti took us back in time, because there was something she needed to do?" <p>

"Yes. She tried to use me, but I wasn't giving her anything to use. She wants to be 'The Destroyer of Nations', but couldn't because of me," Xena said.

"Where do you think she is going," asked Gabrielle.

"To the person who brought her back," answered Xena. "When we get to Amphipolis, I'll send word to Hercules to meet us there."

"Do you know where he is?"

Xena smiled, "Probably wondering why he is in Athens."

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><p> **Welcome to Athens, Home of the Great Athenian Army**

> "Hercules, why are we in Athens?" Iolaus asked. <p>

"We are here because â€œ," Hercules said. He stopped himself when he realized that he didn't have answer for his friend. "I don't know why."

"Did someone send word for us to be here," Iolaus asked.

Hercules shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, since we are here, we might as well put it too good use. I could use a good meal," Iolaus said. "Come on, pal."

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><p> **Homecoming**

> "Thank the gods you are home," Cyrene said. She greeted her daughter with a hug. "We've had some problems in the outlands." She ushered Xena and Gabrielle to a table in her tavern. <p>

"Problems? What sort of problems?" Xena asked.

"A warrior named, Degas," a villager said. "He should be sliced open and should bleed like a stuffed pig."

Gabrielle looked at the villager in disgust, then turned her attention back to Cyrene.

"What's happened so far?" Xena asked with concern.

"No one's been killed. But Tiberius was seriously wounded in this morning's attack," Cyrene said. "You didn't know anything about this?"

Gabrielle looked at Xena.

"We ran into Degas on the pass," Gabrielle said. "He sure did move up from bandit to warlord in a hurry."

"You mean you didn't kill that son of a bitch?" the villager growled.

"I don't kill everyone I fight," Xena argued. She shook her head. "How long have these attacks been going on?"

"For a few days now. Every morning, a new farm," the villager said.

"Thank you," Gabrielle said. She turned her attention back to Xena.

"What about Toris' farm?" Xena asked.

"He maybe on tomorrow's list," Cyrene said.

"I think we should go pay my brother a visit," Xena said.

"Not until you eat first," Cyrene announced. She held her arm out to keep the two women from rising up from their chairs.

"I'll go take care of Argo and get word to Hercules," Xena said.

Her mother looked at her.

"I'll be back before you know it," Xena said. She left the tavern.

"I take it she knows Degas," Cyrene asked.

"All to well," Gabrielle answered.

"Who is he to her," Cyrene questioned. Their arrival in town was unexpected. "Was he in her army?"

"No. She'd remember if he was. It's more complicated than that. I wish we had more time to explain. But Degas is a dangerous person. He has this power," Gabrielle said.

"This must be serious if you are sending for Hercules," Cyrene commented.

"Yeah," Gabrielle replied. She eagerly awaited Xena's return. She wanted her where she could keep an eye on her. Their previous adventures were far from scary and unusual.

Cyrene went back to her work.

Xena returned a few moments later.

"What did you tell Hercules," Gabrielle asked.

"I told him to come here," Xena said. "I bet he and Iolaus are probably enjoying themselves in Athens. They won't remember us being there."

"If we've gone back in time, does that mean Minos â€“ ?" Gabrielle asked.

"I don't know. We need to this Janus, like you said."

"And Alti?" Gabrielle cautiously asked.

"She knows we would have followed her. What's worse, is that she'll be able to predict what we'll do to stop her," Xena said.

"That's why you sent for Hercules," Gabrielle said.

"No. I sent for Hercules for a completely different reason. Alti had help. She just didn't come back all by herself," Xena said.

"Do you know who?" Gabrielle asked.

"No. But I've got a couple of ideas," Xena said. "It's getting to be almost sunset, we should go see Toris."

Gabrielle nodded in agreement. She finished her food then followed Xena.

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><p> **Visiting Toris**

> "What do you want me to do," Toris asked. <p>

"Give them what they want," Xena ordered.

"Are you nuts?" Toris questioned.

"Degas Â€," sighed Gabrielle. "Has this special ability."

"And you can't defeat it?" Toris asked. He gave his younger sister a glaring look. He found it hard to believe that Xena was telling him to do this.

"Not here," Xena said, calmly. She what Degas was capable of. She didn't want to fight Degas in Amphipolis. She had to draw Degas outside of Amphipolis.

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><p> **Going to See Degas**

> "Xena. I didn't think you would show up," Degas said.
<p>

"Attacking villages isn't your style Alti," Xena said.

"You know me. I know you. I take their pain, their fear Â€" but you already knew that didn't you?"

"You tried to use me, but it didn't work."

"Of course. Your pathetic 'way' is too strong to be broken. And then, too many people tried to stop you from taking control. Even you did fine a job of trying to stop yourself. Only it made you weaker. Then that friend of yours Â€" well Â€" ruined it again."

Xena grinned.

"You obviously, you want something," Alti said.

"So do you. Who helped you Alti?" Xena asked.

Alti laughed. "No. No. You'll find out soon enough."

"Was it Laurasia?"

Alti didn't say anything. "You'll find out soon enough. Go Xena, I don't want to fight now. I want this to take place later."

"Of course not," Xena said.

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><p> **The Night**

> "Where did you go?" Gabrielle asked. She was sitting by the fire.
<p>

"I wanted to check something out," Xena said. She sat across from her friend.

"What did you find?" Gabrielle asked.

"Nothing of use," Xena said. She stared into the fire.

"You know where, don't you?" Gabrielle asked.

Xena let out a slight laugh, "I still don't who it was. I can tell who it wasn't. It wasn't me. I have this feeling," Xena said.

"I get those too," quipped Gabrielle. "I think we should get some sleep." Gabrielle went to her room.

Xena stayed by the fire. Everyone had gone to bed, except her.

>

Chapter Nine

>
 Degas is Coming

> Morning had come. It was now only a matter of time before Degas would make his rounds to the local farmers. Xena and Gabrielle waited for Degas to show his scum himself, but he never showed. Amphipolis was spared today. <p>

Xena knew this was unusual behavior, for any thug. She should know, she used to do it herself. Generally, warlords and bandits made good on their threats to villagers. It was what they used to gain control. Xena knew Alti too. Then again, attacking villages wasn't Alti's style.

Xena decided to go back to Degas' camp, just for a look. Gabrielle followed behind. They found the camp to be completely deserted. They weren't tidy about it either. Degas had moved his army out unexpectedly.

"They moved out in a hurry," Gabrielle said.

"And it wasn't because of us either," Xena said. She kneeled down to look at some wagon tracks in the mud. "They left not long ago." She got up and sighed.

Gabrielle walked over to Xena and asked, "Are we going to follow her?"

"No."

"How come?"

"We wait for Hercules and Iolaus, then we go." Xena walked passed Gabrielle, not giving her a second look.

"There is something you aren't telling me Xena," Gabrielle said. She knew when Xena wasn't being honest with her on something. Xena wasn't telling her the full truth.

Gabrielle suddenly remembered a time when Xena left for Chin to kill the Green Dragon. "Let's forget the cryptic talk for a second, are you going up against a dragon?"

"No." answered Xena.

"Is the Green Dragon a person?"

"Yes."

"Who?"

"The one I'm going to kill."

"You owe someone so much that you are willing to throw away this past few years?"

"Yes."

The sound of the howling wind brought Gabrielle back to reality. She shook her head to shake off the vision she just had.

"We better get back before the storm hits," Xena said. She headed back to the village.

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Reliving the Past

> "I killed her Xena." <p>

"No. You couldn't have," consoled Xena.

"No. I killed her â€". "

"By accident you â€". "

"No. I killed her â€". "

This woke Gabrielle suddenly. She found it difficult to breath. She felt her forehead, it was drenched in sweat. She got out of the bed and walked over to the window. She looked out in the night sky. The smell of fresh rain calmed her.

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>
 "Where is Gabrielle?!"

> The clash of thunder awoke Xena. She looked around, only to discover that it was the storm that had awoken her from this painful memory. It was all to vivid to her though. She remembered Ephiny trying to stop her. She remember Joxer trying to stop her. The look in Gabrielle's eyes. The confusion. The anger. Xena decided she

needed to take a walk, in the rain no less. <p>

She walked into the woods and felt a strange presence behind her. "I know you're there Ares."

"What is about me?" asked Ares.

"Does it really matter?" Xena asked back.

Ares gave a small smile, "Degas is on the run. Then again, Degas hasn't been himself lately either."

"Sacking a village isn't his style, I take it?"

"He's doing this for a reason Xena," proclaimed Ares.

"Oh â€“ I know that," Xena said.

"I also know that Degas, is well â€“," Ares couldn't finish his sentence.

"Occupied at the moment. What is it you want Ares? It can't be good," remarked Xena.

"Do you always hate me, or is this some sort complex you have against us Gods?"

Xena let out a slight growl.

"It's good to have you back. You had me worried there for a second," Ares said. He put his hand on his sword.

"Cut to the chase Ares, what do you want?" Xena asked again. She hated repeating herself. Especially to the God of War.

"Always want to get to the point don't you Xena. Very well, your friend didn't come back here by her own. She had help," Ares said.

"Tell me something I don't know," warned Xena.

"These visions you are having. Even Gabrielle's â€“."

"Gabrielle?"

"Oh yes. Hers are worse than yours I'm afraid. She has a lot more to deal with. They are all connected," Ares said. He approached Xena.

Xena moved back away from him. "What do you mean worse?"

"All you are experiencing is almost throwing your little friend off a cliff. She is reliving the whole thing," Ares said.

Xena walked passed Ares to held back the village.

Ares turned around, "Leave Hercules out of this Xena."

Xena stopped and turned back around, "Why Ares, I didn't realized you cared about us mortals. I guess you'd rather sacrifice me, your first

"

Ares stepped back in amazement.

Xena looked into his eyes. "Yes, I know. I've known for awhile now."

"Doesn't matter. I can help you Xena," proclaimed Ares.

"I don't need your help Ares," Xena said. She turned and proceeded back to the village.

"The power is stronger Xena," warned Ares.

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>
 It's In the Past

> Gabrielle left her room to sit by the fire in the tavern. She stared into the fire, lost in thought. Xena had often warned her of this habit. It left you open for an attack. Gabrielle didn't care anymore. She was starting to figure it out. She knew Xena knew too.

<p>

"Gabrielle?" Xena asked, quietly.

Gabrielle turned around and acknowledged Xena. She turned to stare back into the fire. "It's him, isn't it?"

Xena walked towards Gabrielle and sat down next to her. She didn't have to say anything. Gabrielle knew.

"Why?" Gabrielle asked.

"I don't know why," Xena said, taking a deep breath.

"I never meant to hurt you Xena." apologized Gabrielle.

"Hurt me?" Xena asked.

"Chin â€" Solan â€" Hope."

"It's in the past Gabrielle. We've moved on. It's behind us now. We are better friends now. We've learned a lot, been through a lot," Xena said.

"But it still doesn't changed what I've done," Gabrielle said. Her voice cracked.

Xena could tell Gabrielle was beating herself up over this. "Don't let it bother you. Alti is doing this to try to break us up. This â€" all of this, is apart of her plain."

"I hate this feeling," Gabrielle said.

"Get some sleep," Xena ordered.

Gabrielle gave a slight smile and went back to her room.

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>
 The Halls of War

> "So this is the Halls of War? Looks like a trash heap if you ask me," Tragis said. <p>

"Don't speak ill of the God of War's temple Tragis," warned Antonius. "You never know who might be lurking around."

"Quiet, both you. Help me get this thing off of this pit," Degas said.

The three large men wrestled with the huge rock for what seemed like eternity. They finally managed to get it off and rolled the rock to the ground.

"What is this," Tragis asked. He looked down into the hole.

"I wouldn't get too close to that," warned Degas.

Perhaps it was spontaneous combustion. Or maybe it was something else. The force of the explosion, sent Tragis and Antonius back several feet, knocking both men to the ground.

"Whoa!" exclaimed Tragis.

"This is," announced Degas. A smile appeared on his face from ear to ear.

Flames were coming up and out of the pit.

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>
 The Deliverer

> "It is Dahak's will!" proclaimed Khrafstar. <p>

"Xena!" screamed Gabrielle.

"I'm coming Gabrielle!"

"Dahak already has a sacrifice in Gabrielle, but it is your blood Xena, that will welcome him into the world," said Khrafstar. "I am the Deliverer!"

The lightning struck near the bedroom. It was close enough to light up the room totally. "Ahhhhh!" screamed Gabrielle. She jolted forward.

Hearing the scream, Xena bolted into the room.

Gabrielle's breathing was labored. "Dahak?"

Xena ran over to Gabrielle. Lightning struck again, this time knocking Xena to the floor. Xena shook it off. She stood back up and looked at Gabrielle. Xena couldn't believe what she was seeing. It was happening, again.

Something started to pull Gabrielle out of the window.

"Xena!!" screamed Gabrielle. She was unable to stop from pulled out of the window. She looked at Xena, and pleaded for help.

Xena ran towards Gabrielle and grabbed hold of her friend, but she too was pulling pulled by this force. Xena allowed herself to be pulled. Wherever Gabrielle was going, she was going there too.

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>
 Dahak vs. Greece's Mightiest Heroes

> "Hercules, it's Dahak!" exclaimed Iolaus. <p>

Hercules moved beside his friend. The two warriors now found themselves in the Halls of Wall.

Iolaus heard someone scream, he looked up and saw Gabrielle trapped in ropes of fire.

He looked back at Hercules he was staring at the man in front of him. "Found another warrior Dahak?"

"This warrior is all powerful!"

"Yi-yi-yi-yi!"

Hercules recognized the familiar cry.

"Xena?" Gabrielle asked, astonished.

Xena landed beside Hercules. She drew out her sword.

"Xena!" screamed Gabrielle.

Xena looked towards the scream and saw Gabrielle. She turned back to Dahak.

Dahak looked at Xena, one look was all it took. Xena went flying backwards.

Hercules turned at watched as his friend landed against a wall and fell to the ground. When Xena started to get up, Hercules turned back to Dahak.

"What do you want Dahak?" Hercules asked.

"To finish up old business," Dahak said. He looked at Iolaus.

Something told Iolaus to duck, and just in time too. Dahak started throwing swords and knives at the three warriors. They were ready to fight.

"Give it up," warned Xena.

"You can't defeat me this time Xena," argued Dahak. "I am all-powerful."

Xena took her chakram and threw it at Dahak. Dahak deflected it and sent it back towards Xena. She reacted quickly to catch the chakram. She looked directly at Dahak.

"Remember this Xena?" Dahak charged Hercules. Hercules tried to step back out of the way, but Dahak was too quick. Dahak grabbed a hold both Hercules and Xena. Xena and Hercules struggled to get free of Dahak's grip. Dahak kicked Iolaus to the ground, knocking him unconscious. "This is what is going to happen to your friends after I've killed you Xena." Dahak's gripped grew tighter on Xena's throat, almost crushing it. It was suffocating Xena.

Hercules struggled. He grabbed a hold of Dahak with both hands.

Shocked, Dahak let his guard down.

Hercules found his chance and pulled Dahak's grip off Xena. Xena fell to the ground, barely able to breath.

Xena looked up and found Gabrielle still surrounded by flaming ropes.

Xena helped Iolaus up.

"Get Gabrielle, and get her out of here," ordered Xena. "This is our fight."

Iolaus knew better than to question Xena. He had to figure out how to get Gabrielle out of the flaming ropes. This wasn't going to be an easy task, obviously.

Xena moved besides Hercules. The two friends stared at Dahak, Dahak stared back.

"Another chance! You brought me back to defeat me Xena. The problem is, you also brought back my powers. What's the matter Xena? Having trouble fighting me in my spiritual state? Don't â€“ I'm real â€“ formed from the evil of the earth. And I'm a much better fighter than you ever dreamed."

Dahak once again, started throwing knifes.

"The pit!" Hercules said.

Xena's attention was turned to the oncoming soldiers into the Halls of War.

"Great," Hercules said.

"You deal with the soldiers, I'll deal with Dahak!" Xena ordered.
"The only problem is Dahak, you forgot one thing. The vision!" Xena flew towards Dahak, knocking him the ground.

Hercules fought the soldiers. "Iolaus, find something to put into the pit."

"XENA!" Gabrielle screamed again.

"It's happening again Xena," Dahak warned. Dahak rose up. He straightened himself out.

Iolaus looked around for something to cover the flaming pit.

Xena grabbed a hold of Dahak, "Eat this!" Xena then tossed Dahak into the flaming pit.

The flaming ropes disappeared from Gabrielle. As she fell, Iolaus caught her and helped her sit down before turning his attention towards the pit.

Xena moved next to Iolaus and Gabrielle. Hercules finished off the rest of the soldiers. The ones that remained ran out of the Halls of War. Hercules then joined his friends to watch what was about to unfold in front of them.

Another explosion came out from the pit. Pieces of rock and dirt flew out and covered the area. A figure came from out from the fire.
"Another time Xena." The figure then disappeared from the Halls of War quickly as it appeared.

"Xena?" Gabrielle asked, searching for her friend. Even though Xena was standing right next to her, she couldn't find her.

Xena kneeled beside Gabrielle. "I'm here Gabrielle."

"It's happening again." She turned to Xena.

"What?" asked Xena.

"I can feel it," Gabrielle said. She started to cry. She buried herself in Xena's arms. She didn't want to relive this part.

"Let's get out of here," Xena said. She helped Gabrielle up and the four friends left the Halls of War.

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>
 Is It Really the End?

> "Are you sure it wasn't real" Gabrielle asked. <p>

"I'm sure. Dahak already had you once, I don't think he'd want you again. I know I wouldn't," Xena said with a cracked smile.

Gabrielle rested her head on Xena's shoulder. "She's still out there."

"I know," Xena said. "We'll meet again. But for now, we'll move on."

Gabrielle continued to rest her head on Xena's shoulders and asked, "Will it ever really end?"

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> **

EPILOGUE

>
 The two set of friends parted their ways. Hercules and Iolaus went off in one direction. Xena and Gabrielle went in another. Xena and Gabrielle talked about what happened. Xena's transformation back into her old warlord days, Alti and Dahak's return. Was Dahak really gone? Is Alti really gone?

One thing remained clear to the heroines. Dahak may have been gone, but Alti was still out there. And still powerful. They had to find you Alti, before Alti caused more trouble.

>
 "Join me Xena and I'll make you the 'Destroyer of Nations.' "

>

THE END OF PART 1

>
 COMING IN PART 2 of "The Destroyer of Nations"

Xena sets out on her own to find Alti, leaving Gabrielle behind with the Amazons. Gabrielle befriends an aging Amazon Warrior who tells her story of how Xena knows so much about the Amazons. Meanwhile, Alti has her own set agenda of becoming "The Destroyer of Nations" and with the help Laurasia, an old protege. Alti travels back in time get some help.

Gabrielle discovers a lost possession during her visit with Ephiny's tribe. Gabrielle learns of Xena's crimes against the Amazon Nation.

>
 Xena seeks help from an unlikely allie.

>
 NOTE Laurasia is a character I created. I switched because Oteri and Yakut become a vital part later on.

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End
file.